

Heritage Lottery Fund

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**A Guide to the Use of the Heritage Lottery Fund  
Parks for People Standard Visitor Survey  
Questionnaire**

**Final Draft**

September 2005

## Contents

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<b>Introduction:</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Development of the GreenSTAT VSQ: Methodology</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Why use a Visitor Survey Questionnaire</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>How is the information used?</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>The Structure of GreenSTAT</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>Implementing the VSQ</b> .....	<b>19</b>
<b>Achieving a Representative Sample</b> .....	<b>19</b>
<b>On Site Interviews</b> .....	<b>23</b>
<b>Off Site Interviews</b> .....	<b>25</b>

**Postal VSQ ..... 26**

**Non-Use ..... 27**

**Appropriate Numbers of Responses ..... 28**

**Interviewer Code of Conduct ..... 29**

**The Use of Incentives ..... 30**

**Analysis of the Data ..... 31**

**The Use of Consistent Question Numbering ..... 37**

**Appendix One: Individual Questions ..... 38**

## Introduction:

It is recognised that parks and green space services have suffered from serious decline over the last 30 to 40 years. The erosion of the services in terms of political priority and reduced operating and investment budgets have led to a decline in quality standards. In 2001 the Public Parks Assessment (Urban Parks Forum) reported that over 37% of park and green space stocks were in decline. In addition to the general decline in green space infrastructures, the report also identified the widespread loss of both functional and decorative features and facilities such as toilets, paddling pools, cafes and tea bars. This loss of features and facilities has inevitably had a negative impact on the appearance of sites and their ability to fully satisfy the needs of a diverse range of visitors. A similar study examining country parks (Towards a Renaissance of Country Parks; Urban Parks Forum; Countryside Agency 2002), demonstrated that country parks were facing broadly similar difficulties.

Since 2001, there has been renewed interest in the sector from government, and a greater acknowledgement of the value of green

space services and the contribution they make to vibrant and sustainable communities. Living Places Cleaner, Safer, Greener (ODPM; 2002), set out the governments vision for all public spaces, and included its response to the recommendations of the Urban Green Space Task Force. Within the report, government calls for improved green space services that better meet the needs of the local communities they serve:

“Good parks and green spaces make neighbourhoods, towns and cities attractive and appealing. They are an integral part of the wider public space network and as much a part of the urban fabric as its buildings.....The needs of all people should be served, especially children and young people, older people, those with disabilities, minorities and people in disadvantaged areas. Over time the needs of people and their communities change. Today people want a more diverse range of green spaces that cater for the social, educational and physical needs and changing lifestyles”.

The government’s position places pressure on local authorities to halt the decline of parks and green spaces. It calls for better quality standards, an improved information base, and service delivery based on meeting the communities needs.

Many local authorities are striving to respond to the government’s challenge and are actively seeking ways to deliver high quality cost effective green space services, and stabilise or improve their financial resources. Information about visitors, who they are, what they do, where they come from, and what they like or dislike about the services provided, must be integral to any strategy to bring about improvements. Visitor Survey Questionnaires (VSQ) have the potential to provide local authorities with the information they need to support strategic planning and service development, and yet a very high level of inconsistency and variance is notable in the standard of VSQ’s used by local authority green space departments, and some still do not undertake any form of site based visitor surveys.

This need for robust visitor information regarding use of the park, to help park managers improve services, has led GreenSpace to develop a standard or generic approach to site-based visitor surveys. Named ‘GreenSTAT’ the GreenSpace VSQ can be used for all green spaces. This guidance accompanies the GreenSTAT VSQ and addresses:

- The role of VSQ’s – why do it?
- How to use the information generated
- The structure of the HLF standard VSQ

- How to implement the GreenSTAT VSQ

Whilst many green space managers are able to offer some form of visitor survey data to support their management approach, a high percentage of managers have not yet addressed the issue and have no previous experience of using visitor surveys to draw upon. It is hoped that the GreenSTAT generic approach will provide individual park managers with the critical information needed to better understand the needs of the local community in relation to an individual site, whilst also providing data that can be amalgamated to enable local authorities to compare the results obtained at one green space with others at a local, regional, or even national level.

## **Development of the GreenSTAT VSQ: Methodology**

This VSQ is informed by widespread consultation within the parks and green space sector, and a review of existing practice and reference literature. GreenSpace identified local authorities and a limited number of organisations from outside the local authority park sector that had utilised visitor survey questionnaires. From these organisations, GreenSpace received 43 examples of VSQs, and 27 examples of reviews of park-based VSQs by local authorities.

The information provided by these organisations was reviewed by the study team and used to identify:

- Common approaches to VSQs
- Commonly occurring questions within VSQs
- Best practice examples of such questions
- Most commonly used categories such as age categories

A first draft VSQ was produced, informed by the analysis of the example VSQs received during Phase One. This draft was based on the requirement to produce a VSQ that can be used for:

- Face to face interviews on site
- Face to face interviews off site
- Postal based surveys where the respondent completes the VSQ 'at home' and unaided

Additionally the VSQ is required to:

- Contain only questions that provide data that is useful at a local site-specific level and at a national level when aggregated
- The data collected should be clear and unambiguous
- Address the visitor and the nature of their use of the site

- Address the physical qualities of the site as perceived by the visitor
- Address issues of site management as perceived by the visitor

The first draft was widely circulated within the green space sector. The draft was embedded in a document that provided recipients of the draft with explanations for certain approaches having been taken.

The comments that were received were reviewed and analysed and a second draft version of the VSQ produced.

The second draft was then re-circulated to those organisations that provided comments on the first draft. These organisations were asked to review the question set and rank each question according to its value; from 'essential' to 'unnecessary of little value'. They were also given an opportunity to provide further comments. This feedback was used to edit the VSQ to produce a core set of standard questions.

A market research expert was employed to review the draft and provide advice on its content and structure as well as provide generic advice about suitable approaches. The market research advisor has substantial experience of undertaking opinion surveys within local authority / public service / leisure environments.

In addition, GreenSpace has also conducted field tests of the tool, carrying out face to face interviews within a park, in a shopping area adjacent to the same park, and by distributing the VSQ to houses surrounding the park. The experience gained through the field testing has been used to further refine the VSQ and inform this guidance.

# Why use a Visitor Survey Questionnaire

Traditionally green space management has focussed more on issues of land management than with issues of visitor management. In more recent years the sector's views on this have changed, and there is a far greater recognition of the benefits of understanding the needs and concerns of the customer. This is perhaps in part as a response to pressure on local authorities to demonstrate that they provide value for money services through systems such as 'Best Value'. It is also likely to be due to parks departments striving to provide as good a service as possible within existing budgets. A further incentive for undertaking visitor surveys is that they are often required by grant giving bodies.

VSQ's provide managing organisations with an evidence base that informs service delivery, and any changes to the way in which services are delivered. The use of a VSQ assists green space managers by:

- Profiling visitors according to age, gender, ethnicity
- Identifying where visitors come from and how they get to the green space
- Examining when they visit and how long they visit for
- Examining what they like to do when they visit the green space
- Asking visitors and local residents what they think about the green space and the facilities and services provided thereby identifying areas of strength and weakness.

The first VSQ that is undertaken provides a benchmark against which service delivery can be assessed, providing measurable key indicators such as:

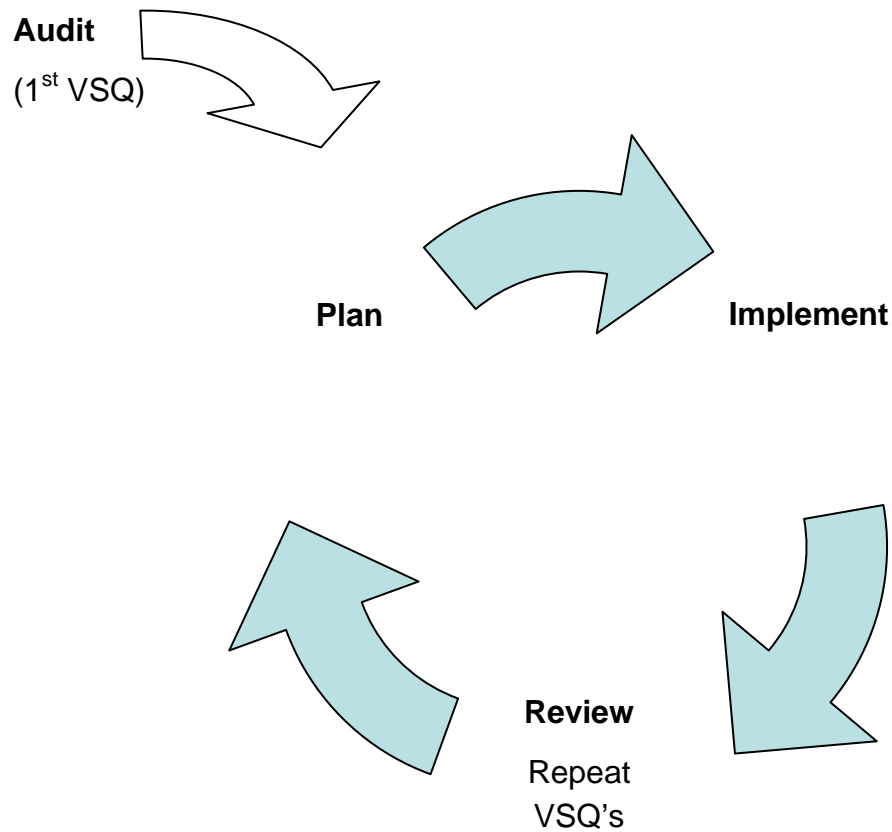
- Frequency of visits
- Duration of visits
- Diversity of customer base
- Overall satisfaction
- Satisfaction with specific aspects of the service

Provided a similar format is used in subsequent VSQ work, it is possible to measure progress and assess the success of any changes and new initiatives.

The intention of carrying out VSQ's should always be to address the key question:

“How can we deliver services better, and leave our customers more satisfied and more likely to visit again”?

The data that arises from the VSQ informs the change process and provides a benchmark against which to measure the effectiveness of any subsequent changes. By repeating the VSQ after changes have been made, managers are able to gauge whether or not the changes have resulted in less criticism and greater satisfaction. Visitor surveys should form the backbone of a classic cyclical review process:



# How is the information used?

## Grant Applications

One of the uses of VSQ generated information is to support grant applications. Prior to awarding a grant, many grant giving bodies will wish to see some evidence that the managing organisation has an understanding of its visitors and how these visitors relate to the green space. The application that is made should reflect the information that is gathered. For example, if the information suggests that many of the local residents are infrequent or even non-users of the green space, or that use is restricted to just using the green space to short cut to the local shops, the scheme for which a grant is being sought should be one that seeks to encourage use by a greater percentage of the local population, or one that seeks to ensure far more diverse use of the green space and increased use of the facilities. If the evidence from the VSQ suggests that the site is well used by the local population but visitors are dissatisfied with the quality of facilities offered, then the scheme should be based on improving standards.

Grant awarding bodies are also often faced with their own pressures to demonstrate that the money they award is well spent and has a positive impact on communities. Where applicants use VSQ's and are prepared to repeat the VSQ after the grant funded scheme has been implemented, it should be possible to demonstrate that the investment provided by the grant giving body has had a positive effect. This assists the grant giving body to justify its continued involvement in green space schemes and helps them to retain or even increase the budget they have available for such schemes.

Where repetition of the VSQ continues year-on-year after the implementation of the improvement grant, it is possible for the green space manager to demonstrate to the grant giving body that standards are being maintained, and that the investment made is being well cared for. This is of particular relevance to grant giving bodies that award substantial capital sums. Some require a long-term commitment to high quality maintenance of the elements of the green space improved through their investment. The routine repetition of the VSQ provides an excellent method of demonstrating that the approaches employed to protect the investment are effective.

## Political Support

The results arising from the use of the VSQ can be used to increase awareness and support from local politicians. Where grant money has been invested and the survey shows increased satisfaction levels, it becomes easier to convince politicians to commit other capital monies towards similar green space schemes elsewhere.

The use of a VSQ can demonstrate to politicians that the service is being well run in terms of management commitment to understanding visitors' needs and identifying potential improvements that will raise satisfaction levels, and increase participation and popularity. This provides politicians with the kind of reassurance they might need in order to feel confident about committing greater support to the green space service.

The evidence gained from the use of a VSQ can also, where necessary, be used to pressurise politicians into action. Where the use of a VSQ is overtly public, with a commitment to feedback the results to the local population, the pressure on the managing organisation to respond and act upon the evidence can be quite substantial.

Before undertaking such work, it is important that managers consider how they will respond, especially if the feedback from visitors is fairly negative showing substantial dissatisfaction with the services provided. There may be operational changes that can be made that do not impact on expenditure but address specific areas of dissatisfaction. For instance, litter may be accumulating in one particular area and this might be easily addressed within existing resources. If it is likely that the resolution of some of the problems that emerge will require investment beyond that which is available, it is important to make sure from the outset that the expectations of local residents are managed. The VSQ could be promoted as the first part of a potentially lengthy process rather than an exercise that is going to lead to immediate improvement.

## Budget Retention

When public services are delivered within an information vacuum, it is hard to construct a meaningful argument in defence against budget cuts. This is because the ability to link reduced budgets to reduced use and satisfaction (cause and effect) is severely undermined.

Through the regular periodic collection of visitor based data, it is possible for managers to clearly demonstrate a continued investment requirement. In the vast majority of cases, it is highly unlikely that the results of a VSQ will show that a green space is perfect with no scope

for improvement. More often, the VSQ will reveal that a notable percentage of visitors are to some degree dissatisfied with some aspect of the service that is provided. Usually a number of issues will emerge as being of particular concern to visitors and residents. By identifying these issues and better quantifying the level of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, it is easier to shift the emphasis of any debate regarding the future of the site towards issues of improvement and responding to visitor needs. Without this level of quantification in place, any such debate will have to be based entirely on theory and subjective opinion, an approach unlikely to be successful against a corporate desire to reduce costs as painlessly as possible.

If the argument that budgets shouldn't be reduced because visitors want and expect service quality to improve fails to convince senior officers with financial control, then the VSQ provides a method of demonstrating the negative impact of any subsequent budget reduction.

If at an early stage it becomes routine management practice to publish and publicise the results of the visitor surveys that are undertaken, it may be relatively easy to ensure that budget cuts, which result in reduced satisfaction, are met with a degree of public outcry and demands for the reversal of financial decisions; the potential for this outcome may be enough to deter the cuts in the first place. However, unless the results of green space visitor surveys are routinely placed in the public arena, financial decision makers will continue to consider green space services as a soft option where budget cuts are rarely noticed and even more rarely attract public criticism.

### Performance Measurement

Public services, delivered by local authorities, are subject to scrutiny through various means including Best Value and Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA). The data arising from the use of the VSQ can be added to the information produced by the service in response to these assessment processes. For this purpose, the VSQ will demonstrate that the service is actively seeking the opinions of its customers, and consulting effectively. GreenSTAT will further support the assessment process by allowing comparison of local results with national norms and averages.

In the case of a good green space that delivers high quality services, the results of the VSQ are likely to demonstrate high satisfaction levels. Where visitors are less satisfied, the department will be able to demonstrate that they are acting upon the information received in order to improve service delivery, at least as far as the available

resources will allow. Where improvements have been achieved, these are likely to be reflected in the VSQ results, demonstrating a proactive and effective management approach.

The periodic repetition of the VSQ also allows departments to set their own targets for increasing visitor satisfaction and monitoring their success against such targets. Again this demonstrates to any review body that managers are well informed, customer orientated and target focussed.

### Informed Decision Making

In an era when capital and revenue resources are often in short supply, green space managers need to ensure that the resources they can obtain are as effectively deployed as possible. The use of a VSQ should help to clarify the improvements that the visitors and local residents see as a priority. The results of the field test that was conducted demonstrated to the managers of the site that their visitors were intuitive and sensible in their aspirations, with certain issues and concerns being raised by a high percentage of visitors. Whilst managers were already generally aware of most of the priority concerns of visitors, and the best way to address these concerns, the comments received added detail and local knowledge that will definitely be used to improve the approaches to resolving the issues, and will help to ensure that any changes that are made will be well received and broadly in line with local consensus.

In addition to addressing the most obvious of concerns, the information arising from the GreenSTAT field test also highlighted a number of valid concerns that had not previously been brought to the attention of site managers. In many cases these concerns were comparatively minor and easy to resolve within existing budgets, and yet they were clearly irritating a number of visitors.

GreenSTAT also provided visitors with an opportunity to commend the efforts of staff and managers, and in the case of the field test site, a number of very favourable comments were received.

### Monitoring Change

The routine and regular use of a consistently applied VSQ can help to track changes that occur over a number of years, by providing a baseline against which subsequent results can be compared. Where a distinct and obvious change to the physical nature of the green space, or the way in which the green space is managed occurs, it would be expected that the visitors' views about these changes will be evident immediately, and the next VSQ that is undertaken will show the changes in perceptions and views.

More often, changes to the physical nature of the green space or operational or management practices tend to be quite subtle, and can go unnoticed by visitors. However, these changes may well still impact on the perceptions of visitors, creating gradual increases or decreases in satisfaction levels, often too gradual or subtle to be picked up by normal communication channels between managers and visitors. However, over a relatively short time period, these changes to visitor perceptions and satisfaction levels will become evident in the results of the VSQ.

Sometimes, it may not be changes that have taken place within the green space itself that cause perceptions and satisfaction levels to change. The local population is also likely to be slowly evolving in terms of demographic profile. The population may be ageing, or becoming richer or poorer, the amount of time that visitors may have available to spend in the green space may be increasing or decreasing, and, their likes and dislikes, hobbies and pass-times may also change over time. By collecting information about age and gender, duration of stay, main reasons for visiting etc, the VSQ allows managers to consider how these changes within the local resident population may be impacting on visitor profiles and satisfaction levels. Services that are relevant and well liked today may not be as relevant in ten years time, especially if they are targeted towards a distinct customer group. Ward based census information can also be used to assist managers to understand these changes.

### Keeping Customers Informed

The VSQ can be used as a focus for communication between managers and visitors. Visitors feel involved when their opinions are actively sought. Where these opinions are then publicised and acted upon, visitors feel that they are being listened to and involved in the management process. This feeling of engagement and involvement can lead to a much more supportive and well informed visitor base that has a better understanding of the multi functionality of the green space, and the diversity of visitors and their needs.

Where action or improvement plans can be developed that directly tackle visitors' concerns, these can be promoted to local residents, demonstrating that managers are listening and doing all they can to resolve concerns. This should help to ensure that visitors are as patient and supportive as possible, and divert or delay criticism.

Responding to individual criticism can be a time consuming and unproductive drain on available resources, which might be better employed addressing the failings of service delivery. The VSQ results can show the public that an area of concern has been recognised and

acknowledged, and that steps are in hand to address the issue, thereby preventing numerous complaints and requests for information from concerned individuals.

### **Effective use of volunteers**

The information arising from the use of the VSQ will help to prioritise plans for improvements and changes. Where volunteers are involved in the green space the feedback from visitors can also be used to help shape their work programme.

The VSQ also provides an opportunity to ask respondents whether they would consider joining a friends group (Question D7 and D7a). Those who express an interest can then be sent information about local voluntary groups, and encouraged to participate.

# **The Structure of GreenSTAT**

## **Introduction**

Primarily the main body of GreenSTAT is provided in three sections; Part B addresses details about the visit; Part C addresses the visitor's perceptions about the site; and, Part D addresses the visitor themselves. In this way GreenSTAT addresses who is visiting the green space, what they do when they visit, and what they think about the green space and the services that are provided.

An additional section, Part A, is provided for office use to record the details of the site and in the case of the on-site interview version of GreenSTAT, the conditions in which the interviews took place.

The Off-site interview version of GreenSTAT has one short additional introductory question placed between Section A and Section B. The purpose of this is to find out whether the person being interviewed in the street knows which site the interview refers to; clearly if they have never so much as heard of the green space, there is little point in completing a full interview.

This part of the guide looks at each of the four sections of GreenSTAT (A-D) in more detail.

### Part A 'Office Use'

The purpose of Part A is to record identification details for the site in which the survey is taking place to ensure that the data collected is attributed to the correct site. In the case of the on-site interview version of GreenSTAT, Part A also collects details about when the interviews took place and the prevailing weather conditions at the time. Weather and time of interview can influence which types of visitors may be present on site and in turn this may affect the results obtained from the survey. For example, if the interview is taking place on a hot afternoon during the weekend, or while the schools are on holiday, it is likely that there will be a higher than normal percentage of visitors with children. If the interviews are taking place on a cold, wet, midweek morning outside the school holiday period, a higher than normal percentage of visitors may not be fully employed, perhaps retired residents visiting the green space to walk their dog or take a short cut to the local shops.

In the event that one set of interviews produces data that appears untypical and at odds with data normally produced about a particular site, the information recorded in Part A can be examined for clues to explain the peculiarity. The information recorded in part A can also be used to check that two sets of data gathered through different interviews (perhaps in different years) are reasonably comparable by showing that both interviews were conducted under similar or comparable circumstances.

### Part B 'About Your Visit'

This section of GreenSTAT examines the nature of visits to the green space, in particular:

- Where do visitors come from;
- How do they get to the site;
- How long do they stay;
- Who accompanies them; and,

- What they do when they visit.

It is important to remember that the on-site interview version of GreenSTAT tries wherever possible to deal only with the details of the current visit, and by and large avoids asking the respondent about their 'typical' patterns of use. It is therefore more factual and less subjective than the postal version of GreenSTAT which asks residents to consider the nature of their 'typical' visits, relying on memory and self analysis.

### Part C About the Green Space

This section of GreenSTAT examines visitors' perceptions of the green space, in particular:

- The visual appearance;
- Standards of care and maintenance;
- Accessibility through the green space;
- The facilities and services that are on offer; and,
- Additions that visitors would like to see.

As GreenSTAT is a generic model that can be applied to any type of green space, it is not possible to provide respondents with a bespoke list of facilities and services and features that are found in that particular green space. Instead, visitors who rate any particular aspect of service delivery as below satisfactory are encouraged to briefly describe their issue. This approach is consistent throughout this section. As a general rule for interviewers and for data handlers, it should be noted that even satisfied visitors may still wish to make comments, and these should be duly noted and considered.

The questions that are contained in Section C are identical and presented in the same order in both the postal and on-site versions of GreenSTAT.

### Part D About the Customer

Having examined the nature of the visits made, and the perceptions of visitors about various aspects of the green space, Section D now examines the visitor themselves. Within surveys, there is a natural tendency to put this set of questions towards the front of the survey. This can have a negative effect by putting the respondent on edge and making them feel that it is the visitor that is the subject of the interview rather than the green space. By moving this section to the back of the VSQ the respondent provides their opinion more freely and openly and once they are convinced that the VSQ is an honest

attempt to gather opinions about the green space, they will be more willing to provide their personal details, safe in the knowledge that these are not the real motivation for the study.

The questions contained in Section D allow managers to gain a better understanding of the visitor base in terms of:

- Address;
- Age;
- Gender; and,
- Disability.

# Implementing the VSQ

## Achieving a Representative Sample

It is important to take what steps you can to ensure that the VSQ collects a sample of views that are as representative of visitors and the local resident population as possible. The purpose of carrying out the VSQ is to gain the views of visitors and local residents, and if the views that are gathered are not representative, then only a partial picture is achieved. This can seriously undermine the potential to better understand the needs of visitors, and to develop plans and approaches that are well received and result in increased use, increased diversity, and increased satisfaction.

There is a tendency for VSQ's to always be slightly non-representative of the full range of visitors. Known as 'non-response bias', those who are less willing to take part in the survey are inevitable likely to be under-represented. The only way to minimise non-response bias is to keep the questionnaire short and relevant.

In the case of on-site interviews, regular visitors who visit the site often will have a greater chance of being invited to complete an interview simply because they spend more time on site than other visitors. Those who tend to stay on site for longer are also likely to be more receptive to the invitation because they are in less of a hurry, and because as regular visitors, they are more likely to have a greater affection for the green space and therefore be more willing to help. However, what a random selection process can theoretically achieve is a representative sample of visits. In other words, the profile of visits about which data is collected will be broadly representative of all visits made to the green space (e.g. in terms of what proportion of visits involve use of the play areas, what proportion of visits last for more than an hour, what proportion of visits are made by groups including children etc).

In the case of postal questionnaires, the profile of respondents may also be skewed towards the more regular visitors, or those residents with strong opinions about the green space. Again, regular visitors are likely to respond to the questionnaire because the site is important to them. Those residents with strong opinions, which may often be opinions based on some issue of dissatisfaction, are more likely to respond because they want an opportunity to give voice to their dissatisfaction, and drive home their specific concerns.

With postal questionnaires, it should also be remembered that some members of the community will be more likely to respond than others. Transient or temporary members of the community, such as students and those living in short term rented accommodation where there is a high turnover of tenants, are less likely to respond as they do not feel as strongly attached and committed to an area. Less literate members of the community, or residents for whom English is not their first language, are also likely to be more deterred by the task of self completing the questionnaire. Social norms within the family unit are also likely to come into play, with one member of the family being more likely to complete the questionnaire than the others. In the case of the field tests, the vast majority of postal questionnaires were completed by females aged 30 -39 and 40 -49; probably mothers keen to respond because the VSQ addresses a facility that is important to the family.

Off-site interviews probably offer the best opportunity to collect the full range of opinions. The more random nature of stopping people in the street means that a more diverse range of opinions will arise with an equal likelihood of stopping high and low frequency visitors as well as non-visitors, and residents with strong opinions as well as those with no opinions. However, there are difficulties associated with this

approach. It is likely that in the street environment, a higher percentage of people will be too busy to stop and complete the questionnaire.

### Duration of Interviews

The duration of interview is particularly important when conducting face to face interviews on site. Most visitors will be visiting the green space for a purpose and will not have planned to take part in a survey. Many visitors will be in family groups or groups of friends, or perhaps looking after children, and will only be prepared to spend a few minutes away from the group. By restricting the interview length to around five minutes, the percentage of visitors able to participate will be greatly increased.

During the development of this VSQ, considerable effort was put towards reducing the time taken to complete the VSQ whilst still gathering the most useful information. The final version of the VSQ can be completed comfortably in less than ten minutes, and if the visitor is reasonably satisfied with the green space, and happy to allow the interview to be conducted at a pace, the interview can be completed in just over five minutes. In this way you do not eliminate the views of visitors who are in hurry, or just visiting the green space for a relatively short period of time. A longer version would almost certainly result in information only being collected from visitors and residents who have spare time available, generally the older visitors (retired and semi-retired), the unemployed, and a few other groups.

### Targeting Under Represented Groups

The postal VSQ provides a great opportunity to obtain high numbers of responses but, as already explained, there is a strong possibility that responses will be low from families where English is not the first language of the adults within the family units. In areas where a high percentage of families are from Black and Minority Ethnic groups (BME), specific efforts may be required in order to obtain the views of these sections of the community.

The Census information for the area will provide valuable information about the breakdown of BME groups in the area. Where a relatively high percentage of the local population have a first language that is non-English, consideration should be given to making the VSQ available in the other relevant languages.

Efforts should also be made towards making contact with these groups via facilities that are commonly used by them such as social clubs and community associations, meeting places and places of worship. It may be possible to contact the community leaders of these

groups and obtain an invitation to present the work to the community, explain the purpose of the VSQ and encourage members of these groups to respond. The community leaders may offer to interpret and translate the information and assist members of the groups to complete the VSQ. Often younger members of the family, for whom English may be the first language, may be encouraged to assist their parents and grand parents to complete the form. It may be possible to visit these meeting places and interview residents using the off site interview version of the VSQ.

The approach of targeting under-represented elements of the community, and visiting them in environments where they are comfortable, increases the chances of obtaining the views of non-users. When presenting the work to such a group, the green space staff can explain that although most of the questions contained in the VSQ will be irrelevant to non-users, they are very keen to find out why non-users don't visit the site more often.

It is worth bearing in mind that any such targeted survey will not provide a sample that is representative of the whole population, and so the results should be viewed qualitatively, rather than quantitatively.

Local knowledge of the area and the community that the green space serves is a great asset in these circumstances. Ideally the green space team will have forged links to minority elements of the community over years. Where this has not happened, it may be possible to identify other departments within the local authority that have created good relationships such as the Community Development sections, and they may be willing to act as go betweens and provide the necessary introductions. By demonstrating that the views of these groups are important and actively sought, the exercise of carrying out VSQ's should be embraced as an opportunity to help create or foster good relationships with BME groups in the area.

#### 'Next Customer/Visitor' Principle

It is important to ensure that this benefit of on site interviews is not lost through a 'selective' approach being applied by the interviewers i.e. the interviewers must not choose who to interview.

If interviewers are allowed to choose who they interview, human nature dictates that they are likely to avoid difficult looking visitors, or visitors that might have a language issue, and instead they will choose visitors who look friendly or receptive. They may also be inclined to choose visitors who look like they have some spare time, or are from the same racial, cultural or social background as the

interviewer. To avoid this, interviewers should be instructed to follow the 'next customer' principle.

The way the 'next customer' principle works is simple. As soon as one interview has been completed the interviewer turns to the next visitor and asks them if they would be prepared to be interviewed. If they decline, then the next visitor is asked and so on until a visitor agrees to take part. In this way, there is no selection process, and no personal preferences or prejudices are brought to bear, the profile of those interviewed is effectively random.

## On Site Interviews

On site interviews provide the best opportunity for obtaining an accurate picture of who uses the site and what they do, as they are based on actual real visits, they are a snap shot of the real situation on the ground.

Because of this, the on-site interviews also provide the simplest opportunity to obtain clues about the site's catchment area. By finding out how far real visitors have travelled to visit the site, as well as the visitor's post code or street name or full address, managers can obtain a meaningful picture of the catchment. The more on-site interviews that are completed, the more detailed and accurate the understanding of the catchment area will be.

When conducting on-site interviews, managers need to consider when the interviews take place, and the weather conditions prevailing at the time of interview. Green spaces attract different visitors at different times of the day, different times of the week, and different times of the year. In order to be truly representative, the interviews should be undertaken at a variety of times of the day, week and year. For example, if the green space has a substantial and popular play area, and is positioned near a school, during the period of time between the school closing and 6.00pm, there will be a disproportionately high percentage of visitors who are accompanying children to the play ground. Likewise, interviews that are conducted on a cold and wet morning in January are likely to include a disproportionately high percentage of retired, semi-retired, or unemployed dog owners.

The data gathered through on site interviews can be aggregated as a single set that provides the most representative views. Data can also be considered and held as individual data sets that can be compared with data collected at similar times a year later. By retaining the data sets as individual units, it is possible to consider how the profile and views of visitors change according to different times i.e. how do mid-

week spring time visitors differ from summer weekend visitors? Part A 'Official Use Only' collects the data that allows this kind of detailed comparison to take place, and often holds the clues when occasionally the data arising from one set of interviews seems radically different to another.

When attempting to analyse the data produced from on-site interviews it is vital to remember that the data addresses visits rather than visitors. For example, if 25% of respondents to on-site interviews say that when they visit the park they stay for 2 or more hours this should not be reported as 25% of visitors spend 2 hours or more at the green space. Instead it should be reported that 25% of all the visits that are made to the green space last for 2 hours or more.

### Location

It is recommended that visitors are invited to complete the VSQ as they leave the green space. There are a number of advantages to interviewing visitors only as they leave:

- Respondents will be able to give more accurate information on the length of their visit and what they have done during it (e.g. you can ask how long they have stayed, rather than how long they expect to stay);
- They will have had more opportunity to form an opinion on the facilities at the site. This is particularly important for first time visitors, who will find it difficult to respond if they have only just arrived at the site and are not familiar with it;
- If a next-person sampling technique is employed for visitors exiting the site, the length of their stay will not affect their likelihood of being interviewed, and so the profile of visits about which data is collected will be representative of all visits in terms of the length of those visits.

The place where the on-site interviews take place can also have a bearing on the results obtained. Most green spaces provide a choice of entrances and exits and the type and number of visitors through each will vary. The variations are caused by factors such as:

- The housing stock near the entrances and exits;
- The position of available green space facilities in relation to the entrances and exits;
- The flow of pedestrian and vehicular traffic in the streets adjacent to entrances and exits; and,

- The presence of facilities such as schools, libraries and shops and their relationship to the entrances and exits.

For example, if there is a school near one side of the green space and a play area is positioned on the same side of the green space as the school, depending on the time of the day, any interviews that are conducted on that side of the green space are likely to involve a disproportionately high percentage of visitors who have visited the play area. If there is a housing area on the East side and the only nearby shops are positioned on the North side, if the interviewer is positioned at either end of the path that runs East to North, they are likely to get a disproportionately high percentage of visitors who are only visiting the park in order to take a short cut to and from the shops.

Where the layout of the green space allows it, exit surveys represent the best approach, with interviewing rotated across all possible exits. Where sufficient staff resources exist, consideration should be given to conducting interviews simultaneously at all exits.

### Weather

There can be no doubt that the profile of users is affected by the weather conditions. During very cold or very wet weather, more casual visitors who do not need to visit the green space are likely to stay away. Interviews that are conducted in poor weather conditions will feature a disproportionately high percentage of visitors such as dog walkers, or visitors short cutting to get somewhere else.

As well as affecting the profile of visitors using the space, poor weather conditions will also tend to produce much higher refusal rates (no-one wants to stand around answering questions in the rain), and less consideration may be given to the responses for the same reason.

Ideally a degree of flexibility should be built in to the choice of days when interviews are conducted and very poor weather conditions avoided. This is especially important if the interviews are all to be carried out in a fairly compact time frame rather than taking place across the range of seasons. In these circumstances every effort should be made to hold the interviews during reasonable weather conditions.

## Off Site Interviews

As on-site interviews collect the views of real visitors, and the more frequently they visit the more likely they are to be interviewed, and postal self completed questionnaires again tend to collect the views of

more regular visitors and particularly those with an opinion they wish to express, off-site interviews potentially offer the best opportunity to gather the broadest range of views. They also offer the only real opportunity to pick up on the views of non-visitors. The VSQ has been carefully designed to identify non-users and infrequent visitors at the earliest possible stage. Once identified, they are then asked to identify any changes that would encourage them to start visiting the green space, or to visit more often. They are then asked to complete Part D 'About You', and the interview is completed very quickly.

Off site interviews appear to work best when the VSQ addresses a green space that has a town or city wide appeal. In these cases, the interviews can take place in the centre of the town or city where it is reasonable to assume that most residents will at some point visit and you are therefore interviewing a truly representative sample of the whole population. An advantage of the off-site VSQ when applied in this town or city wide situation is that it is possible to obtain an idea of what percentage of the total population uses the green space, and how often i.e. if 20% of the people who are interviewed say that they visit the green space, then it is reasonable to assume that 20% of the total population of the town visit the green space.

When the off site VSQ is used for a green space that only has a local audience, it is not so reasonable to use the data to estimate total number of visits and percentage of the local population that uses the green space. This is because there is probably no way of knowing what percentage of the local population uses the off-site area where the interviews are being carried out. In some circumstances there will be an obvious spot from which to conduct the off-site interviews where it is likely that the vast majority of local residents will pass by. In most cases there will be no such centre of community activity available. It may be sensible therefore to conduct the off site interviews in several different locations that are reasonably busy and popular with the local community.

## Postal VSQ

In most cases, the distribution of the postal version of the VSQ should be linked to the expected catchment area of the green space. Although the VSQ has been designed to allow non-users and infrequent users to complete the form very quickly, distribution beyond the immediate catchment area probably represents a waste of time and effort, as the questionnaire is unlikely to be returned.

It should be pointed out that the postal VSQ has limited ability to help define and better understand the true catchment area. The forms that

are returned will show where respondents live and how far they travel to visit the green space, but the fact that 25% of the forms may be returned from one street and only 5% from another only shows that the residents of one street are better at completing and returning forms than the other. There may be a number of reasons why this occurs, entirely unrelated to the percentage of local residents that use the green space. For example, one of the streets may overlook a particularly noisy area of the green space, perhaps a car park area frequented by noisy youths at night. The residents immediately affected by this problem are far more likely to respond to the VSQ than those who overlook a quieter area on the other side of the site. Other reasons for variable response rates from different streets may include issues such as literacy, ethnicity, and age.

The one time when the postal version of the VSQ may provide some assistance in terms of understanding the catchment area, is when the green space in question is of town or city wide importance. In this case, distribution of the VSQ to every residence, or a sample of residences throughout the town, may have value, although again the socio economic factors that can influence the recipient's likelihood of completing the form come into play.

In this circumstance, a better approach may be to conduct Off-site interviews in a town or city centre location. This would be likely to provide a more accurate picture of catchment and total use, but would probably be a more expensive exercise than sending a postal VSQ to every household. The comparative cost of each approach would largely depend on the size of the town or city.

## **Non-Use**

The only version of the VSQ that provides reliable data about levels of non-use is the off-site VSQ, especially where this is used in a town or city wide location, and addresses a green space that has a town or city wide catchment, or when there is an off site area consistently used by the same resident population that the green space serves.

The on-site interview version of the VSQ cannot address this issue as by its very nature it only captures the views of real visitors undertaking real visits. The postal version is unlikely to be of much value because non-users are unlikely to complete it as they see it as irrelevant to them. Locally conducted off-site interviews are often unreliable because of the difficulty of finding a location that is commonly used by the vast majority of the local population.

Targeting population groups that may include high percentages of non-users such as pensioner groups or BME groups, and arranging

to meet the group in their meeting places, can be a good way of encouraging non-users to explain their reasons for not using, or rarely using the green space. This provides managers with the opportunity to try and convince these sections of the local community that their opinions matter, and that managers are genuinely interested in the reasons why some people don't choose to visit the site.

It is worth bearing in mind that the reasons for non-use can often be similar to the reasons why those who do use the site don't visit more often. All respondents are asked to describe what would encourage them to visit more often or stay for longer. The responses to this question, from all respondents, may provide some useful clues to why some residents don't visit the green space at all.

The VSQ cannot achieve everything and still be an effective means of gathering the views of green space visitors. The need to keep the VSQ brief prevents it from being able to look at issues of non-use or infrequent use in any great detail. If non-use is considered to be a particularly important issue for a site i.e. there is a feeling that a high percentage of the local population does not use the site, or a feeling that particular sections of the local community avoid the site, then managers should consider undertaking a more specific study that addresses this issue exclusively and in detail. The best methodology for this may be to put together a focus group consisting of members of the community felt most likely to be amongst the non-users and to run a consultation session to specifically discuss this issue.

## **Appropriate Numbers of Responses**

The sampling sizes chosen for a given piece of research are usually a trade-off between available resources (time and budget) and required statistical confidence in the results. The exact number of responses required often depends on the need to analyse subgroups within the sample. For example if a subgroup of users is felt to represent around 10% of the total, and a representative sample is to be achieved, an overall sample size of 300 would collect the views of only 30 users in this subgroup, which may be felt to be insufficient. The most appropriate sample size will therefore also depend on the diversity of types of user within the population and the need to sufficiently reflect the views of all these different types of users. Therefore a small park with few facilities may be able to adopt a smaller sample size than a large park with a very diverse user base.

Ward based census information can be an extremely useful guide to the number of responses needed as it provides a demographic breakdown for the area that can be compared to the profile of

responses received. The aim should be to distribute sufficient numbers of VSQs to achieve a profile of respondents that broadly matches that of the local community in terms of age, gender, disability and ethnicity. In this way, the responses that are received can be said to be representative of the community that the green space serves.

The field test conducted as part of the development of this VSQ achieved a 25% return for postal versions of the VSQ. It should be pointed out that the VSQ was distributed to 200 residences that either immediately overlooked the green space or were just one street behind those that overlooked the green space. It is likely that with wider dispersal of the VSQ to properties further away from the green space, the response rate would probably fall.

When determining how many responses are required it may also be worth considering how frequently the consultation will be repeated. If it is the intention to carry out this kind of consultation on an infrequent basis, perhaps every five or ten years, it would seem appropriate that a high number of responses are obtained. If the VSQ is to be distributed annually or biennially, a smaller number of responses might be completely acceptable.

## Interviewer Code of Conduct

There is a Code of Conduct, produced by the Market Research Society that covers the manner in which market research interviews are undertaken. If a professional market research company is employed to conduct the research on behalf of the managing organisation, they should be members of a professional body and will be bound by the Code of Conduct. If resources do not allow the employment of a professional market research company, and the interviews are going to be carried out by green space staff, the staff involved should be made conversant with the Code of Conduct.

In essence the Code of Conduct is there to ensure that interviews are carried out in a polite, honest, and unobtrusive manner:

“Research is founded upon the willing cooperation of the public and of business organisations. It depends upon their confidence that it is conducted honestly, objectively, without unwelcome intrusion and without harm to respondents.... Respondents must be informed as to the purpose of the research and the likely length of time necessary for the collection of the information..... Finally, the research findings themselves must always be reported accurately and never used to mislead anyone, in any way.” (Market Research Society Code of Conduct)

The Market Research Society Code of Conduct is currently under review, with the draft revised Code available on their website ([www.mrs.org.uk](http://www.mrs.org.uk)). Guidance relating to fieldwork can be found on Page 14 of the revised Code.

In essence, prior to the interview taking place, and as part of their approach to a potential respondent, the interviewer needs to provide the following information:

- The purpose of the interview
- Which organisation is conducting the interview and on whose behalf (if different)
- How long the interview is likely to take
- What the information will be used for
- How, where and when will the results be published and how a copy can be obtained.

Interviewers should never badger or pester a potential respondent, approaches should be polite and courteous, and interviewers should always take no for an answer if a potential respondent declines to be interviewed.

## Children

Managing organisations need to exercise caution when seeking the views of young children. Depending on the age of the child, it may be necessary to obtain parental permission to conduct the interview. Alternatively it may be permissible to give the child an explanatory letter that informs the parents of the purpose of the interview.

It is recommended that anyone seeking to include the views of children and young people in their visitor survey work complies in full with the current good practice guidelines. The Market Research Society has produced guidance entitled 'Conducting Research with Children and Young People' which is freely available on their website [www.mrs.org.uk](http://www.mrs.org.uk).

## The Use of Incentives

It is possible to encourage a greater response rate through the offer of an incentive, although this again needs some care. It is completely inappropriate for a direct financial incentive to be offered i.e. complete and return the form and receive £5.00 back. A more appropriate incentive is to enter the names of respondents into a prize draw, with one or two respondents receiving a prize.

The most effective use of incentives is to encourage a good response rate to postal surveys. Generally speaking, where on and off-site interviews can be completed in under ten minutes, the use of an incentives are not usually considered necessary.

The Market Research Society has produced a 'Free Prize Draws Guidance Note' and it is recommended that this guidance is considered and adhered to if such incentives are to be used. The guidance note can be downloaded from the Market Research Society web site.

## Analysis of the Data

Each of the questions included in the VSQ has been carefully designed to ensure that it provides meaningful 'stand-alone' data that can be considered in complete isolation to the data arising from other questions. Although the data would ideally be stored and analysed through use of a database such as MS Access, a simple Excel spreadsheet provides a perfectly adequate means of managing and representing the data produced.

The graph below (Graph One) is taken from the results of the postal version of the VSQ when used in field tests. The data used to produce the graph addresses the question of frequency of visits in the winter. Table One provides the summary data on which the graph is based. It shows that the majority of respondents are regular visitors to the park with 61.5% visiting either daily or most days. It would be wrong to assume from this response that all local residents visit the park as regularly as this. The over estimate is likely to be due to non-response bias (i.e. those who use the park regularly being more likely to respond to the postal survey).

As previously stated, the residents most likely to respond to the postal version of the VSQ are those with a strong attachment to the place. The fact that 25% of the VSQ's that were distributed were returned by residents, suggests that the park is the kind of facility that is used very frequently by a comparatively high percentage of the local population, it is integral with the lives of many of the local residents. This interpretation of the data is further supported by the results of the on-site interviews where 44.4% of all the visits made to the park are made by people who visit daily or most days, with a further 33.3% of visits being made by people who visit once or twice a week.

This would suggest that the park is a highly important to local residents and that it has a very strong and loyal customer base, the kind of customer base that would perhaps be receptive to further involvement. The fact that a high percentage of the local population

are very regular visitors also suggests a degree of success has been achieved in the management of the park, and this was reinforced by section C which looked at satisfaction levels.

The best estimate of frequency of visiting would probably be produced by off-site surveys as these avoid the pitfalls of regular visitors being over-sampled in the on-site surveys, and the non-response bias that is so often a feature of postal surveys.

Graph One Frequency of Winter Visits

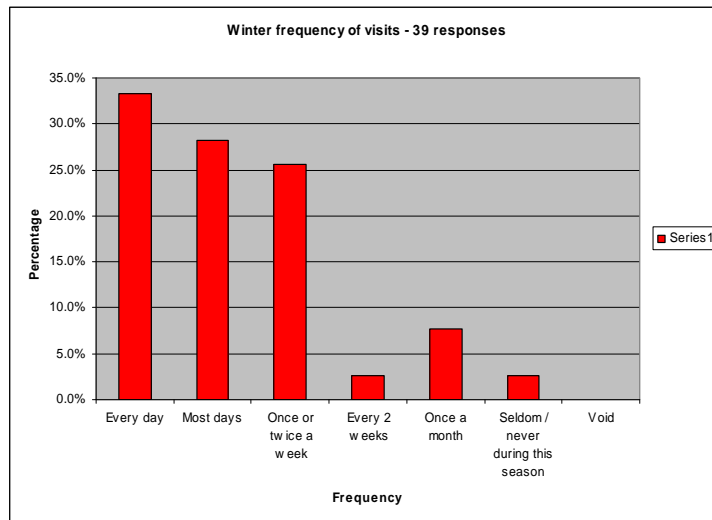


Table One Frequency of Winter Visits

Winter frequency of visits	Percentage
Every day	33.3%
Most days	28.2%
Once or twice a week	25.6%
Every 2 weeks	2.6%
Once a month	7.7%
Seldom / never during this season	2.6%
Void	0.0%

A simple analysis of this data already reveals some useful information about the way in which the green space is used and how it impacts

on the lives of local people. However, the data can also be examined in a more sophisticated way by cross referencing it with other data collected from the VSQ. For instance, it would be useful to isolate data relating to high frequency visitors from that relating to less regular visitors and examine where the differences lie. For instance, what do the high frequency like to do when they visit the green space in comparison to those less regular visitors? Are high frequency visitors generally older or younger than the less frequent visitors? Is it that high frequency visitors generally have children? Are high frequency visitors generally more satisfied with the facilities offered than less regular visitors?

This level of analysis is difficult to achieve just with an excel spreadsheet; it is better achieved through the use of either a database or a statistical package (such as SPSS), where one data set can be linked, cross analysed and compared alongside others.

Great care needs to be taken when analysing individual data sets in isolation. In the example provided above, the comparatively high frequency of reported visits is clearly good news for the managing organisation, illustrating that the park in question is clearly an important and well used local facility; but it provides only a partial picture. The comparison with on-site interview results immediately showed that the overall frequency of visits is probably slightly lower than suggested by the postal results, and questions still remain regarding who the most frequent visitors are, and whether satisfaction with facilities influences less frequent visitors. There is always a danger of reading too much into a single data set, and consideration should always be given to the results, with a process of questioning and examining the underlying reasons being applied to the process of analysis. In the case of the example provided, the most important area of consideration may not be the visitors that frequently visit the green space, it may be more important to examine which members of the local population are less frequent visitors and the reasons behind their patterns of use.

The greatest advantage of using a data base to store and analyse the information obtained is the ability to group or separate data. For instance, the data can be examined as an aggregated total set or managers can choose to look at data relating to one specific group of visitors such as women visitors, visitors that have travelled more than two miles, visitors from BME groups, or any one of a number of other possible combinations. This work can still be done without a database, but it is difficult and very time consuming.

## Satisfaction Ratings

Section C of the VSQ can be used to produce individual and overall satisfaction ratings. For each of the first nine questions included in this section, respondents are asked to rate an individual aspect of the green space on a five point scale from 'Very Good' to 'Very Poor'. By applying a numerical score to each of the five options it is possible to produce a numerical satisfaction rating.

Where a respondent incorrectly completes a question producing a 'void' response or answers 'don't know', these should be excluded from the calculations i.e. if 14 responses are received in total but one is void and one is 'don't know' then the percentage rating is calculated from the 12 remaining responses.

In the example shown below (Table Two) the approach used is to apply a numerical value to each of the five ratings (Very Good to Very Poor). The numerical value is derived by dividing 10 by five so that 'Very Good' equals 10 points and 'Very Poor' equals one fifth of that value i.e. 2.00, 'Poor' equals two fifths, 'Fair' equals three fifths etc.

The example shows data from 12 responses to the question C7 How would you rate facilities and or services that are provided for children and their parents? One of the 12 responses was void reducing the number of responses scored down to 11. When each of the remaining 11 individual ratings is applied, a score of 98.00 is achieved from a maximum possible score of 110 (If 14 responses are received then the total score is divided by 140, for 34 responses, divide by 340 etc). To achieve an overall percentage rating the total score is simply divided by the maximum possible score and then multiplied by 10. In the example provided, this aspect of service delivery received an overall satisfaction rating of 89.09%.

Again, this can all be done relatively easily using only Excel spreadsheets, but a database or statistical package can make the whole process a lot quicker and easier, especially if a large number of responses are obtained.

**Table Two: Calculating Satisfaction Ratings.**

Rating		Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor	Very Poor	
Numerical value		10	8	6	4	2	Sub-total
Responses	1	10					10.00
	2	10					10.00
	3		8				8.00
	4		8				8.00
	5		8				8.00
	6	10					10.00
	7	10					10.00
	8						0.00
	9		8				8.00
	10		8				8.00
	11	10					10.00
	12		8				8.00
Total		50.00	48.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	<b>98.00</b>
Percentage satisfaction = total score (98) divided by maximum possible score (110) multiplied by 100.							<b>89.09%</b>

In this way, a percentage satisfaction rating can be given to each of the first nine questions in section C of the VSQ (C1 – C9). To obtain a single ‘average’ percentage satisfaction rating, the nine individual percentage scores are divided by nine. An example of this approach is provided below in Table Three.

To calculate the ‘overall’ satisfaction, divide the total numerical score achieved by the total possible numerical score, and multiply by 100. This is also demonstrated in Table Three. In most cases the overall score is more meaningful than the average score.

**Table Three: Overall and average percentage satisfaction rating**

VSQ Question	A. Total Score Achieved	B. Number of Responses (excluding voids, ‘don’t knows’ and ‘No opinions’)	C. Maximum Possible Score	D. % Satisfaction Achieved (= A divided by C multiplied by 100)
C1 Design and Appearance	100	12	120	83.33%
C2 Cleanliness and maintenance	76	12	120	63.33%
C3 Access within	60	12	120	50.00%
C4 Range of visitor facilities	94	12	120	78.33%
C5 Horticulture and arboriculture	46	10	100	46.00%
C6 Nature conservation	68	12	120	56.67%
C7 Children’s facilities	98	11	110	89.09%
C8 Sports facilities	48	12	120	40.00%
C9 Overall impression	104	12	120	86.67%
Sub Total	694	105	1050	593.42
<b>Average % Satisfaction Achieved (593.42 divided by 9)</b>				<b>65.94%</b>

<b>Overall Satisfaction Achieved</b> = total score divided by maximum possible score multiplied by 100 (694 divided by 1050 multiplied by 100)	<b>66.09%</b>
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### Polarised Data

When analysing the data received, consideration should be given to the range of scores provided by recipients. Sometimes it is possible to obtain very polarised views will be received, with some respondents strongly supporting an aspect of the green space and awarding very high ratings, and others awarding very low ratings, with no substantial middle ground responses. A straight forward analysis of satisfaction rating will not necessarily pick up on this polarised view, as the high and low scores will effectively cancel each other out and produce a middle of the road satisfaction rating.

Any area of service delivery that attracts extremely opposed views should be treated with caution as there is great potential to exaggerate any existing conflicts that may exist. The best management approach for any resulting development strategy has to be based on trying to lift up the very dissatisfied ratings whilst preserving the very satisfied. As a polarised view suggests that what one visitor likes another dislikes, this is a difficult task. It is likely that in these circumstances managers will need to look at this aspect of service delivery in more detail than can be achieved through the generic questionnaire. In these circumstances the use of focus groups, one with very satisfied visitors, and one with the very dissatisfied visitors, may be the most appropriate way forward.

### 'Hard' and 'Soft' Data

Section C of the VSQ produces both 'hard' and 'soft' data. The satisfaction rating associated with each of the first nine questions is classified as 'hard' data i.e. it is measurable and quantifiable. The 'soft' data is produced when respondents who are less than satisfied with an element of the site are asked to provide comments and reasons for their lack of satisfaction.

This 'soft' data is harder to manage than the 'hard' data, but provides the real clues as to what needs to be changed in order to achieve higher satisfaction ratings. A degree of skill and knowledge is required in order to make the most of this data, and interviewers and data entry staff need to take care to accurately record the comments and to use consistent interpretations. One respondent may refer to the need for a café whilst another refers to a refreshment kiosk, in reality both have similar aspirations; the need to be able to purchase food and drink on site. These two comments and any similar

comments received could be classified as catering outlet or a similar consistent term. This process is known as 'normalising'.

All comments should be recorded, rationalised where possible at the data entry stage as per the catering example given above. A list of comments can then be made and these can be sorted into topic or thematic groups. When rationalising word lists it is important to retain the number of comments received under any of the themes. In the catering example, although the two comments are both requesting a similar additional facility, it is important to record the number of visitors who made this request, as this provides the scale of support for any such proposal.

It is possible to create a database that includes a word management function to assist in this process.

## **The Use of Consistent Question Numbering**

The order in which questions are presented in the VSQ has been carefully considered, and provides a logical flow. It is recommended that users of the VSQ retain the order. HLF will insist that all applicants utilise the VSQ in its current unedited format. By ensuring that all applicants apply the same questions in the same order, HLF will have the ability to routinely compare the results from one green space with those from another. It is hoped that if this VSQ is used in other green spaces (non HLF applicants), it will also be possible to compare the data from these sites. In order to do this, it is essential that the question sequence and the question numbers are always consistent. In this way the data relating to question C9 for a site in the North East of the country can be compared with the data for C9 arising from a site in the South West.

Some potential users of the VSQ (non-HLF applicants) may wish to add or remove questions from the standard set in order to tailor the VSQ more specifically to their individual site. Managers who use the VSQ in this way are encouraged to ensure that at the data entry stage, the questions retained from the HLF VSQ are still given the same number as they have in the official HLF version of the VSQ. In this way it will always be possible to compare the results from one site with another.

Consistent use of the numbering system is also essential for year on year comparison. Where it is planned to use the VSQ as benchmark data, with annual or biennial repetition of the VSQ, managers must retain a consistent numbering system to ensure that the data from one year can be meaningfully compared with the data from following years.

# **Appendix One: Individual Questions**

This part of the guidance looks at each of the individual questions contained within the different versions of the GreenSTAT visitor survey questionnaire. It provides potential users of GreenSTAT with some indications as to why questions have been formatted in certain ways, and how the data arising from the use of GreenSTAT might be used.

## Part A Site Details

### A1. All Versions: Name of park or open space

In some cases visitor survey work may be taking place simultaneously on a number of sites. Recording the site name helps to ensure that the data gathered is associated with the correct site. In the case of postal versions of the GreenSTAT questionnaire Part A should be completed prior to distribution ensuring that the residents who receive the questionnaire know which space it addresses. The name of the site concerned should be shown clearly in this section of the questionnaire (14 or 16 point font in bold), and reinforced through a cover letter that accompanies it.

### Additional Site / Administration Details: On-Site and Off-Site Interview Versions

On-site interviews and off-site interviews using the questionnaire may be repeated in subsequent years. To ensure that the data collected year on year is as comparable as possible, it is important to record details about the circumstances of the interviews, in order to replicate these in following years.

Managing Organisation: This data field is provided to assist market research organisations using the GreenSTAT questionnaire for more than one managing organisation. Alternatively, a county or district council with variable responsibility for green spaces in the wider geographic area may wish to isolate data for all green spaces managed by one of their town or parish council partners.

Town / City / Village: One organisation may be responsible for more than one open space of the same name. By recording the name of the town, city or village in which the space is located, it is possible to ensure that the data that relates to each site is kept separate.

Location Reference: Interviews addressing one open space may be conducted in several different locations. The location where the interviews take place should be recorded. Managers should use a map of the green space to identify locations and provide an identification reference that can be referred to in the future, for instance the main entrance could be 'location one'.

In the case of the use of the GreenSTAT questionnaire in off-site street based interviews, again it is important to record where the interviews took place in order that any subsequent repetition of the survey occurs in the same locations.

Name of Market Research Organisation: If external market research companies are employed to undertake the interviews, this data field allows managers to record which company was involved in each interview. This may be important as a quality control measure in the event of some data appearing to show marked differences to other data.

Name of Interviewer: This is also recorded primarily to assist with potential quality control issues and peculiarities in data sets.

#### Date of survey

It is particularly important to record the date that the survey took place for a number of reasons:

- If the data from this particular round of surveys appears untypical and different to that gathered during other surveys on different dates, managers can check for peculiarities that relate to the date. For instance, the date of the survey may have clashed with a major sporting event, an election, or a local event taking place nearby such as a carnival.
- By recording the date of the survey it can be compared against school holiday dates.
- Where managers are seeking to establish benchmark data that can be compared year on year, they may choose to carry out their surveys on or around the same date as previous years, helping to ensure as much comparability as possible.
- A local resident and regular user of the open space, who for some reason was not included in the survey, may question its validity because they did not witness the surveys taking place. The availability of the date the survey took place may help to appease the resident and explain their absence.

#### Weather conditions

The weather conditions on the day of interview can have a direct bearing on the types of visitors available for interview, what they are doing on site and how long they stay. Foul weather will drive away parents with children and indeed most other green space users with the exception of dog walkers and those who use the green space as a short cut to get elsewhere.

#### Interview day / Interview time / Holiday periods

The visitor profile and the activities that visitors are engaged in will vary depending on the day of the interview and the time that the interview takes place. Weekend and bank holiday visitors may be more likely to be visiting the green space for a longer period of time

and may arrive in larger groups. Mid-week, Mid-day visitors are less likely to be visiting with children of school age, and are also likely to stay for a shorter duration.

Again, this data can be a useful check for ensuring that the data gathered in one year is as comparable as possible with data gathered during other years.

## Off-Site Introduction

**Intro 1 Off-Site Version Only:** Have you heard of the park or open space called.....?

When interviewing people in the street, the first thing to establish is whether or not they know the green space that the interview addresses. Interviewers should be aware that many green spaces have a number of different local names as well as the official name given to them by the managing body. It may be worth including any of these additional names as a list and it is also worth having an OS map available to show people where the green space is in relation to street names. For larger sites that have a wide catchment area, the issue of what percentage of the local population know of the green space is interesting in itself and may highlight a marketing and promotion issue.

If the person being interviewed does not know of the green space by any of its names, or recognise it from the map, go straight to Section D, or conclude the interview if the person is unwilling to complete Section D.

If they know of the site the interviewer should precede to the first question in Part B of the questionnaire 'About Your Visits'.

## Part B Questions

**B1a All Versions:** How often do you visit the park or open space?

This first question immediately establishes whether or not the respondent is a non-user, infrequent visitor, or more regular visitor. In the case of the off-site interviews, the introductory question identifies those residents that do not know of the site and directs them straight to Part D 'About You'. In the case of on-site interviews the option for non-user is not required.

Non-users and very rare users ('never visit' and 'less than once a year') are directed straight to C10 (what would encourage you to use the green space more often?). Occasional visitors ('once a year' and '2 or 3 times a year') are not required to provide more details about

the duration of their visits (B2a & b) and instead directed straight to B3. More regular visitors are asked to provide more details about the frequency of their visits in question B1b.

**B1b All versions: How often do you visit the park or open space?**

This second part of B1 examines more closely the frequency of use of more regular visitors. For simplicity and practicality, the frequency of use is broken down into two seasons: 'winter' (from late autumn to early spring) the period where the weather is generally a discouragement to green space visitors; and 'summer' the period from late spring to early autumn when the weather is generally good enough to encourage green space visits.

In the development of GreenSTAT consideration was given to using all four seasons for both frequency of visits (B1) and duration of visits (B2), but it was felt that this was too time consuming and detailed for most respondents and the information yielded was not of sufficient value to justify its inclusion.

Where respondents seldom or never visit during one of the two seasons (most likely to be in 'winter') they are routed past the relevant section of B2, i.e. if they do not visit during winter, they are not required to complete B2a.

**B2a All Versions: In the winter, how long do you normally stay?**

This question examines the duration of visits during the winter period. It provides further detail by breaking visits down into weekday and weekend visits.

**B2a All Versions: In the summer, how long do you normally stay?**

This question examines the duration of visits during the summer period. It provides further detail by breaking visits down into weekday and weekend visits.

**B3 On-site Version: 'Where have you travelled from today?'**

**B3 Postal / Off-Site Versions: 'When you visit the park or open space, where do you normally travel from?'**

This question attempts to provide some details about who the visitors to the green space are, and the nature of their visits. It provides useful groups by which aggregated data can be broken down i.e. do visitors who come straight from work do different things to those who come from home? If the majority of visitors appear to visit from home they may be more likely to make more frequent and longer visits than those who only use the green space during their lunch breaks. People visiting from home may also be slightly less concerned about the availability of refreshments, although because they are more likely to

be visiting with their children, they may be more concerned about the availability of toilet facilities.

When used in an on-site interview situation, this question provides managers with a reasonably accurate breakdown of where visitors are coming from. It can help to inform management decision such as whether or not there may be a market for catering facilities, or whether or not the entrances nearest the commercial sector of the neighbourhood need to be improved because so many visitors come to the green space from work.

The effectiveness of this question when used within a postal version of the questionnaire largely depends on how widely the questionnaire is distributed. If the questionnaire is only distributed to the houses immediately surrounding the green space, the vast majority of respondents will report that they visit from home. If the questionnaire is distributed more widely, a more accurate and informative data set will be achievable. When addressing a large site which is believed to attract visitors from a wide catchment area, the quality of the data obtained for this question will depend entirely on the manager's ability to widely distribute the questionnaire.

In Part D 'About you', respondents are asked to provide address and post code details. These can be cross referenced to those respondents that report that they travel from home, providing useful information in relation to catchment areas.

**B4 On-site Version: 'How did you travel here today?'**

**B4 Versions: 'Approximately how long is your journey to the park or open space?'**

**B4 Postal / Off-Site Version: 'How would you normally travel to the park or open space?'**

This question is less concerned about the 'type' of visitor, and more concerned about the practical issues of access points, car parking etc? Again the success of this question within the postal version of the questionnaire depends on the ability to widely distribute. By examining the methods of transport used by visitors, managers can develop plans to either better accommodate the most popular forms of transport i.e. enlarge car parks and improve entrance points, or to influence and change visitor behaviour by improving cycle routes, promoting walking, and liaising with public transport organisations to improve public transport links to the site. If repeated in subsequent years, GreenSTAT provides managers with a method of assessing the success of such initiatives.

**B5 On-site Version: 'How long did your journey take today?'**

**B5 Off-Site Versions:** 'Approximately how long is your journey to the park or open space?'

**B5 Postal / Off Site Versions:** 'Approximately how long does your normal journey take?'

This question builds on the previous question of which method of transport visitors' use, by examining the journey times. Again, when used as a postal questionnaire, the quality of the information obtained relies on the manager's ability to widely disseminate the questionnaire.

This question can be cross referenced to B4 which examines methods of transport, allowing managers to understand typical journey times for each mode of transport. If a high percentage of car borne visitors take more than a few minutes to reach the open space, the ability of managers to make visitors less car dependent will be severely reduced. In these circumstances, effort would be better put towards effective management of vehicle access and car parking issues as well as liaison with public transport.

This improved understanding can be further enhanced by also considering postcode and address details where they have been provided.

When derived from on-site interviews, the data from this question can help managers to better understand the likely catchment area of the green space.

**B6a On-site Version:** Are you visiting alone or in a group?

**B6a Postal / Off Site Versions:** Do you normally visit the park or open space alone or with a group?

Looking at normal patterns of behaviour, this question seeks to identify what percentages of visitors normally visit the green space alone, and what percentage visit in groups. Lone visitors are a good indicator that the green space is considered relatively safe. Groups of visitors indicate that the green space supports social activity. A good balance of lone and group visits is desirable. The data from this question can be cross analysed with gender, age groups, and even ethnicity in order to examine whether some groups are more likely to visit alone than others.

A third option of 'both' is provided. This is included in the On-site version of the questionnaire as a respondent may be alone at the point of interview but planning to meet with a group later.

When lone visitor data relating to the test site was examined, it was found that the largest group who visit the park alone were elderly females (26.7% of lone visitors). This suggests that the park is viewed

by local people as a safe place to visit. It also suggests that there may be some scope for delivering services such as health walks targeted at this section of the society, bringing together the many single elderly women who are regular but lone visitors to the park.

**B6b On-site Version:** ‘Who is visiting the park or open space with you today?’

**B6b Postal / Off Site Version:** ‘When you visit as part of a group, who normally visits the park or open space with you?’

These questions provide details about the relationships that exist within the groups that visit the open space. Within the field tests that took place it was clear that the groups primarily consisted of parents and children (50% of the groups included parents with children) accompanied by friends (75% of the groups that included parents with children also included friends). The results would suggest that the park is a very popular destination for family groups, with parents with children representing a substantial percentage of the visitor base.

Surprisingly none of the groups that included parents with children also included grandparents. The data is a little crude as there may have been grandparents present that were below the age of 60, but generally it appears that only two rather than three generations are included in the family groups that visit the park. This could be an area of achievable improvement and may well be a result of the lack of refreshments and good quality toilets on the field test site.

**B6c On-site Version:** Including yourself, how many are in your group today?

**B6c Postal / Off Site Versions:** ‘Including yourself, how many people would normally be with you when you visit the green space as part of a group?’

If the respondent is visiting in a group, this question provides details about the size of the group and the gender and age profile of the group. This question is only completed if the respondent has already confirmed that they generally or sometimes visit the green space in a group. Those respondents that generally visit alone are not required to complete this question.

In the field tests it quickly became clear that most groups consist of male and female adults accompanied by male and female children. None of the groups contained elderly males, and very few contained male teenagers (2.4%). Only 3.6% included elderly females and only 6.0% included female teenagers.

As postal questionnaires are often completed by a responsible adult within the household, it is perhaps not surprising that teenagers do

not feature highly in the identified groups. However, the on-site interviews that took place suggests that this section of the population are visiting the park but in single generation groups made up entirely of friends and piers.

**B7 On-site Version:** 'Why have you visited this green space today?'

**B7 Postal / Off Site Versions:** 'What do you normally do when you visit this green space?'

This is an important question and allows managers to understand what their visitors like to do when they visit the green space. When used as part of an on-site interview, respondents are allowed to tick as many options as appropriate as long as they are or have engaged in these activities during the current visit. When used as a postal questionnaire it is important to limit the number of options that can be chosen. In this way managers can see what the most important activities are for each type of respondent. With a reasonable sample size this data can be further broken down into types of visitor i.e. what do BME women do when they visit the green space. If the number of options that postal respondents can choose is left open it is likely that many of them will choose to tick all or most of the options because across their entire period of involvement with the green space (sometimes a lifetime of involvement) they are likely to have participated in each of the available options even if only once.

**B8 On-site Version only:** 'How long have you stayed here today? / How long do you expect to stay here today?'

This additional question for the on-site version of the questionnaire is provided as part of the distinction between examining a real visit, and collecting data about typical visits and patterns of visitor behaviour. The two versions of the same question allow for on-site interviews to be conducted either as a visitor is leaving the green space (recommended approach), or at some point during the visit.

The data arising from this question can either be viewed on its own as an indicator of actual time spent on site from a selection of real visits, or compared with B2a and B2b 'How long do you normally stay?' (seasonal breakdown). By comparing these different ways of examining duration of visit, managers should be able to achieve a good understanding of how long most of their customers visit the green space.

This data is an important consideration when planning any development or improvement of the site where lengthening the duration of a typical visit may be a target, and can be used to help determine what new facilities and services might be appropriate. If the data suggests that typical visits are for less than 30 minutes, it is

likely that the current range of facilities and services are inadequate to support longer stays. The question can be combined with C10 On-site and Postal 'Can you think of anything that would encourage you to use the green space more often or stay for longer?' It can also be cross analysed with B7 'What do you normally do when you visit the green space'?

Alternatively if typical visits last for one or two hours, this may suggest that there is an adequate market to support the introduction of income generating facilities such as cafes, which short stay visitors would not have time to enjoy.

## Part C Questions

### **C1. All Versions: 'How would you rate the design and appearance of the park or open space?'**

This question examines the visual impact of the open space upon the individual, and as beauty is in the eye of the beholder, the range of responses received may be fairly variable. However, it is also likely that an overall opinion about the visual quality of the green space will emerge. In the field test that was carried out the issues that were raised as a result of this question included:

- The flatness of the site;
- The neglected boundary fence;
- The presence of graffiti;
- The interference of car parking around pedestrian routes; and,
- The neglect of planted areas.

### **C2. All Versions: 'How would you rate the standard of cleanliness and maintenance of the park or open space?'**

This question examines visitors' perceptions about the efforts made by maintenance teams responsible for cleaning and maintaining the green space. In the field test that was carried out the issues that were raised as a result of this question included:

- Excessive litter;
- The need for more bins;
- Graffiti;
- An untidy recycling area;
- Dirty toilets;

- Poor leaf clearance;
- Infrequent grass cutting in certain areas;
- Insecure playground gates; and,
- Recognition from several respondents that the problems were caused by poor visitor behaviour rather than a lack of effort by the staff.

**C3. All Versions: 'How easy is it for you to get around the park or open space?'**

This question examines accessibility within and around the green space, and should help to identify area where people feel that access could be improved. Within the field test, none of the respondents stated that they had mobility problems, and the test site was fairly flat and formal, and well furnished with reasonable quality footpaths. As a result, satisfaction levels with this aspect of the test site were very high.

**C4. All Versions: 'What do you think about the range of visitor facilities that are available?'**

In the field test, this question produced one of the lowest levels of satisfaction. It should be noted that satisfaction levels are likely to be higher for on-site interview responses as the mere fact that the visitor is there and present on the day suggests that something amongst the range of attractions must appeal to them.

The option of 'Not Applicable' is provided for this question to enable the questionnaire to be applied to the broadest possible range of open spaces. It allows the respondent to suggest that in their opinion visitor facilities would be inappropriate for the space. This is one of the more useful questions for examining the aspirations of the visitor i.e. a visitor who has children but no access to a playground will remember that the site lacks a playground. In the field test that was carried out the issues that were raised as a result of this question included:

- Poor toilets;
- Lack of appropriate facilities for the elderly;
- The need for a café or refreshment kiosk;
- Inadequate seating;
- The need for picnic facilities near the play area; and,
- The predominance of sports facilities.

**C5. All Versions:** How would you rate the standard and maintenance of the trees, the flowers and flower beds, shrubs and grass areas in the park or open space? (The horticulture and arboriculture)

Accepting that horticultural quality is an important issue within parks management, but that in some sites it has a fairly low profile; this question was devised to test visitor's perceptions on this issue. The field test site had no floral bedding areas but does have formal planted areas where shrub beds are reasonably diverse and well maintained. The issues that were raised as a result of this question included:

- The lack of flower beds;
- Quality of shrub beds is variable;
- Trees and grass areas look good;
- Paths not swept;
- Very little weeding done;
- Edges of grass areas are rarely trimmed; and,
- Would like to see the reinstatement of flower beds that used to be provided.

**C6 All Versions:** Thinking about the care and protection of nature and the wildlife that lives in the park or open space, the insects, birds, and animals etc, how would you rate this aspect of park or open space management?

The wording of this question has been carefully chosen to reflect the fact that nature conservation is a very variable issue from one type of site to another. Within the field test the one surprise result that emerged was the percentage of visitors who chose the 'don't know' option. The field test site actually did very little work towards nature conservation and produced very little information about the work that it does do; this was reflected in the results with one of the lowest satisfaction ratings achieved. The issues that were raised as a result of this question included:

- The need for a proper wildflower area;
- Need for nesting boxes;
- Very little done for wildlife; and,
- Concern about the growing numbers of rats and pigeons because of people leaving too much bread for the pigeons.

**C7 All Versions:** How would you rate the facilities and or services that are provided for children and their parents?

This question has been worded to reflect the fact that whilst many open spaces provide facilities specifically targeted at children and their parents such as play areas and paddling pools, many do not. Whilst some sites do not have specific facilities, they generally all welcome children as part of their customer base and may still provide useful facilities such as toilets, and picnic areas. Sometimes the less specific facilities may be more appropriate for the site, and the question allows visitors to express their satisfaction even where no specific facilities are provided. Alternatively the option of 'Not Applicable' is provided, allowing the respondent to suggest that facilities for children and their parents are inappropriate for this space.

At the test site issues that were raised as a result of this question included:

- Spoilt by poor toilets;
- Syringes and other drug paraphernalia sometimes found near play area;
- No refreshments available;
- Play area needs more seating and a picnic area; and,
- Equipment suitable for older children such as a basketball court is needed.

**C8 All Versions: How would you rate the sports facilities that are available?**

This question is in some ways similar to C8 in that not all sites will provide specific sports facilities but most accommodate sporting activities to some degree. This question will not be relevant to all open spaces especially those that are managed primarily for their ecological value, civic spaces or very small sites primarily managed as formal gardens or play spaces. The option of 'Not Applicable' is provided, allowing the respondent to suggest that sports facilities are inappropriate for this space. However, for the majority of sites where GreenSTAT is likely to be used, sports facilities will be an area of interest that demands the inclusion of this question.

At the test site the issues that were raised as a result of this question included:

- Stadium should not be in the park;
- More needed for low income families;
- Like to see the reintroduction of the tennis courts;
- Reintroduce marking out athletics track on the grass areas;

- Greater range of options needed, as this is the only sports facility in the area; and,
- Basketball court needed.

**C9 All Versions: 'What is your overall impression of the park or open space?'**

This very open question can be regarded as the main benchmark against which improvement can be tested. It is an opportunity for visitors to provide their feelings about the green space as a whole rather than to comment on specific elements. It is here that the feelings of affection or dislike are most likely to surface. This question has been placed towards the end of this section as it was felt that the visitor would give a more informed answer having just spent some time thinking about individual aspects of the open space such as its appearance or the facilities that are offered. The level of satisfaction is likely to be more realistic and slightly more critical than if this question were to appear very early on in this section.

A popular and well liked open space is likely to achieve a reasonably high satisfaction rating for this question even when the respondent has been quite critical about specific elements of the space. An unpopular and poorly functioning open space is likely to score badly with this question even though some of the individual elements covered by the preceding questions may have achieved reasonable satisfaction levels.

**C10 All Versions: Can you think of anything that would encourage you to use the green space more often, or stay for longer?**

Because the GreenSTAT questionnaire tries to provide only fairly generic questions that are applicable to most sites, this is a very important question. It allows respondents the opportunity to raise any specific ideas or areas of concern they may have that haven't been picked up by the range of non-specific questions that are provided. For example, the questionnaire does not specifically address the issue of personal safety and fear of crime. Many of the green space sector professionals who contributed to the development of the questionnaire expressed concern that questions that raised the spectre of fear of crime are often misleading, enticing people to express concern because they think they should, rather than because a genuine fear exists. Anyone with a genuine fear of crime is likely to identify their fear as one of the things that prevents their increased use of the site. This question is designed to draw out existing concerns rather than instigate new ones.

The most important thing about this question is that it addresses specifically what visitors want in order to visit more often or stay for longer, and allows them to do this in their own words. In most cases, increased use of the open space should be the overriding objective of successful management. The issues that were raised as a result of this question included:

- Well managed café needed;
- Bring back the car boot sale;
- A nature trail;
- Cleaner and better toilets;
- Improved standards of cleanliness;
- General face lift to improve the appearance;
- More visitors to improve the feeling of safety;
- More seating;
- Putting green;
- More activities and organised activities for children;
- Make five-a-side, volleyball and badminton nets and pitches available in the grass areas;
- Presence of park keepers or wardens would improve the feelings of personal safety;
- More events festivals and shows, and open air plays;
- Improved lighting on main paths;
- Open sports days;
- Better equipment in the adventure play area;
- More tree varieties;
- Keep car parking away from pedestrian routes;
- More picnic tables; and,
- Control of illegal use of quad bikes and mini bikes.

**C11. All Versions:** Are there any more comments you would like to make about the way this park or open space is managed or maintained, the facilities that are available, or the activities that take place?

This 'catch all' question allows respondents to raise any other issue that they may have that has not been forthcoming as a result of the more specific questions. The inclusion of this question has an added

benefit in that it really does help to convince the respondent that it is their views that are important in this process. Whilst many respondents chose at this point to simply re-iterate the issues that they are most concerned about, many others were able to put forward ideas that had not been previously mentioned by them. The issues that were raised as a result of this question included:

- Excessive litter around the park edges;
- Information boards are needed;
- Provide better habitats for wildlife;
- Improve the appearance of the recycling area;
- Car parks are an intrusion;
- Create more quiet and peaceful areas;
- Eliminate problems of drug use and dealing;
- Improve / create flower beds;
- Shabby appearance of some buildings needs to be improved;
- Better enforcement of dog fouling legislation;
- Install gates so that the car park area can be locked at night; and,
- Better separation on shared footpaths and cycle routes.

## Part D Questions

**D1 All Versions:** 'Which of the following categories best describes your age?'

When reviewing other visitor survey approaches substantial variation was noted in the different approaches to the issue of age of the respondent; there appeared to be no consistent and commonly adopted breakdown of age groups. The research discovered that the national census relies on respondents providing their date of birth. As a statutory survey, it is possible for this approach to be taken but the intrusive nature of such an approach was felt to be inappropriate for a questionnaire such as this.

It was felt to be important that the data collected through the use of the GreenSTAT questionnaire could on occasions be compared to population data that existed outside the green space sector i.e. how do our customers compare to others. The Office for National Statistics (ONS), which publishes much of the available information regarding demographics and population behaviour and opinion, uses a consistent approach to age groups. This approach was chosen as the

starting point for the age categories used in this questionnaire. However, the ONS approach was felt to be too blunt to be of maximum benefit to open space managers. The ONS categories are as follows:

Under 16, 16-19, 20-29, 30-59, 60-74, 75 and over

The category of 30-59 was felt to be far too wide for open space management where it is appreciated that the needs of a 32 year old visitor can be substantially different to those of a 52 year old visitor. This category was therefore further broken down to ensure more detailed and meaningful information could be gathered in a format that could then be aggregated if necessary and re-aligned with the categories used by ONS. This was done by breaking down the 30-59 category into the following age groups:

30-39, 40-49, 50-59.

Age is often a factor that has a profound influence on the likes and dislikes of visitors and the activities they enjoy when visiting a green space. The ability to breakdown the data received according to the age of the visitor is therefore very useful.

The collection of information about the age of respondents is also useful in terms of profiling the visitor base and ensuring that all ages are well represented. The field tests suggest that the most useful data collection method for this purpose was the on-site interviews, although these need to be carried out at various times of the day / week / year in order to ensure an accurate picture. With the postal version of the GreenSTAT questionnaire the age profile of respondents is dictated more by who it is within a household that is most likely to go to the trouble of filling in and returning the form, which in the case of the field tests meant that 62.5% of respondents were aged between 30 and 49, and 62% of respondents were female. As 60% of the respondents reported that they generally visited the site as part of a group, it can be seen that the postal questionnaire only provides a partial picture of the visitor profile according to age, and needs to cross reference question B6c.

**D2. All Versions: 'Are you female or male?'**

The gender of the respondent may again affect their views of the site and the activities that they participate in. Similarly to age, it can be useful to separately consider the data provided by female and male respondents, and again this aspect of the data, when collected during on-site interviews, can help to show whether or not the green space is attracting equal numbers of male and female visitor. This data can be cross referenced to D1 to test whether there is an equal gender breakdown throughout the different age groups.

**D3. All Versions: Do you consider yourself to have a disability that affects your use of this green space?**

This question again produced many different concerns and suggested approaches from the sector professionals who contributed. It is well known that a far higher percentage of the population is affected by some form of disability than the figures for registered disabled would suggest. Therefore the option of simply asking whether or not the respondent is registered as disabled was discounted. Furthermore, even if the respondent is registered as disabled, it could be that their particular disability has little or no impact on their ability to enjoy the green space in the way they want. The wording chosen reflects these principles and the most recent practices of some of the leading organisations working in the sector.

As with age and gender, the collection of data regarding disability will allow managers to isolate and separately consider the views of their disabled visitors, and to test whether or not disabled visitors are adequately represented in the profile of visitors.

**D4. All Versions: 'Which of the following best describes your ethnic group?'**

The format of this question is taken directly from guidance produced by the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE). In the past CRE produced a simpler approach, which whilst still credible, is less favoured by them. In both the on-site and postal field tests this version of the question was very successful with all respondents happy to complete the question and no issues raised.

As with age, gender, and disability, the collection of data regarding ethnicity will allow managers to isolate and separately consider the views of their BME visitors, and to test whether or not BME visitors are adequately represented in the profile of visitors.

**D5. All Versions: 'Where do you live?'**

This question has been included in recognition that some open spaces play a part in local tourism by attracting visitors from outside the immediate area. The data arising from this question, especially if obtained through On-site interviews, allows managers to test whether the open space is attracting and satisfying non-residents, and to what degree non-residents are represented in the visitor base. Again, it may be useful to isolate and separately consider the views, patterns of use and perceptions of these visitors.

**D6 All Versions: Prior to taking part in this survey, have you ever been consulted on the way the park or open space is managed or asked if you would like to be involved?**

**D7 All Versions: Would you like to be consulted on the way the park or open space is managed or asked if you would like to be involved?**

The distribution of the postal questionnaire and the on-site interview process provides an ideal opportunity to identify those members of the community who are interested in the management of the open space and may be willing to directly get involved in its management and or maintenance. These two questions (D6 & D7) allow respondents to express their interest and provide their contact details for future communication.

It is good practice to make as widely available as possible the results of survey exercises, and these questions allow managers to create a mailing list through which they can distribute the results to those respondents who took the time to complete the forms. Ideally managers will be in a position to capitalise on expressions of interest from respondents and use this interest to boost direct community involvement through mechanisms such as Friends groups or newsletters.